



PROPAGATION OF ISLAM IN KASHMIR: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Dr. Naseema Bano

PhD Philosophy, Aligarh Muslim University, India.

ABSTRACT

Islam is maintained to have completely spread in the valley of Kashmir in 1339, but basically it entered into the region in the eight century. The genre of mass conversion to Islam occurred in different stages. The credit of spreading of Islam in Kashmir goes mainly to the Sufis but travelers, Muslim traders and officials played vital role in the Kashmir's conversion to Islam.

INTRODUCTION:

Kashmir was a Hindu dominated state in twelfth century. History reports that in 1320 Zulchu invaded Kashmir and Sahdeva fled away, a Brahmin, who considered himself descendent of Lord Brahma, created his hegemony. The common people were in a big dilemma of vacant incumbence which was later taken over by an exiled prince of Laddakh. Kalhana expresses it as a Hindustani society "where there is not a space as large as a grain of sesamum without a Tirtha." Further in his book "Rajatarangini" Kalhana discusses about the origin of Kashmir and says,

"Once upon a time there was the lake of Sati; and from the beginning of the Kalpas the land in the womb of the Himalayas was filled with waters during the intervening period of the six Manus. Now when the present period of Vaivasvats had come, the Prajapati Kasyapa induced the gods Druhins, Upendra, Rudra and others to descend and having caused Jalodbhava, who resided in it, to be slain, founded upon the site of the lake, the kingdom of Kashmir."

There are two opinions about the origin of the name of valley of Kashmir. One opinion reads that the valley "Kashmir" got its name after kasyapa who had helped Nagas and Pischachas settle in the valley, therefore, it was first named as "Kashyapmar" a number of other traditional and mythological theories put forth similar ideas. The other opinion reads that it has got its name from "kashimveer" who was a great warrior and wrestler. (Viquai-Kashmir: Mulla Ahamd) In order to conclude, anthropologists avoided all sorts of interpolation and attributed its name to Kasyapa.

Therefore the history of Hinduism can easily be understood and historically it could be stated that it came to an end in 1339 with a brief intermittent of three years (1320-1323) when a Buddhist ruler Rinchana converted to Islam after being influenced by Syed Abdur-Rahman bulbul, a mosavi Syed, and a Sufi scholar from Turkistan under the title Sultan Sadruddin. The historical anecdote says alongwith Rinchana another Muslim refugee Shahmir also acquired eminence. Syed Bulbul shah when entered Kashmir, he influenced a majority of Kashmiri including the prisoners and soldiers of Zulchu.

The genre of mass conversion to Islam occurred in different stages. The Sufis, travelers, Muslim traders and officials played vital role in the Kashmir's conversion to Islam.

1. Tradesmen:

The presence of Muslims in Kashmir goes back to the eighth century when they occupied the whole of central Asia and marched towards the other regions of the world for the propagation of divine message and establishment of the Caliphate and peace in the world burning under the polytheistic Chauvinism. The presence of Muslims is largely allusive with Arab chronicler, Mohammad Alafi and his son Jaisia, who were awarded Shakalbar, a town of Kashmir by the Rana of Kashmir after they failed to checkmate the Arab army.

Kalhan also supports the propositions of Muslims in Kashmir. He says about Raja Vajraditya (AD, 763-770) that "He sold many men to the mlecchas and introduced into the country practices which befitted Mlecchas". They were in all probably Muslim adventures, fortune seekers and traders as by this time, Muslims had been ruling in the neighboring Sindh and Multan for more than fifty years.

However, the Mlecchas were not allowed to interact socially yet the Muslim traders were largely helped by the local working class to carry out their daily life. But soon Vijraditya adopted the policy similar to that of Zomorin of Calicut and allowed and encouraged the people to embrace Islam in order to solve the problems of Muslim traders and settlers. (Ishtiyag Husain Qurashi). In the eleventh

century when the Turkish were swooping down on the neighboring territories of Kashmir, for fear of Mehmud Ghaznavi's invasion, the policy was discontinued and no one was allowed to enter the territory. Al-Biruni in context with the policy says, "In former times they used to allow one or two foreigners to enter their country, particularly the Jews. But at present they do not allow even a Hindu whom they did not know personally to enter, much less other people". This policy of blocking the roads of Kashmir for neighboring Muslims was a temporary one and even Kashmir Rajas know that such policies would prove to be incongruous and that too when the Muslim rulers were on their borders. Therefore, they revived the policy and extended their hands for friendship with Muslims especially traders and adventurers and then continuous movement of Muslims to Kashmir started.

Central Asian Muslims were considerably good at trading of central Asian Horses which were in great demand in Kashmir and for this purpose they regularly visited Kashmir and this process of trading proved to be fruitful for Kashmiri merchants⁶. It is obviously a naturally accrued tendency that with the help of this continuous movement, Muslims largely influenced the ruling elite and the trading class and assimilated nobles into Islam. And even the Lavanya tribes were found eating "cow's meat in the lands of mlecchas, where they had fled to escape from the wrath of Harsa.

Another important thing to notice is the Muslim singers as courtesan who refused to accept fee from their clients, which has been discussed by Kseumandra a famous polymath of 11th century. They were called as (mleccha Gayanah). They sang for both Shi'-is and Sunnis to spread their belief and influence.

Another significant fact which Marco Polo found worth recording was a section of Muslims who worked as butchers. He says,

"The people of the province (Kashmir) do not kill animals, nor spill blood, so if they want to eat meat they get the Saracenes (Muslim) who dwell among them to play the butcher".

The Kashmiri Brahmins are meat eaters and they hired Muslims for the cause and many of them embraced Islam. However, this group did not get a much respectable position in the society and they were assigned a lowly station. Hence, the tradesmen played a vital role in the transition of Islam in Kashmir and largely influenced the people towards Islam.

2. Political & Military Expansion

The eighth century as already discussed, had witnessed Muslims in Kashmir in the same era, the Arabs made several attempts to conquer the valley resulting which they reached close to the Kashmir and made their stay convenient in the neighboring countries situated in the north and west Kashmir.

"In 713, when Mohammad bin Qasim the Arab general occupied Multan he marched towards the frontiers of Kashmir called Panj Nihayat. But the threat to Kashmir was averted as the general was recalled by the Caliph Walid (705-715) to his court. Later sometimes after 757-58, Hisham bin Amir Al Taghlibi, the Arab Governor of Sind also made an attempt to conquer the valley. But owing to its natural frontiers, he could not make it. Baladhuri is supported by no local evidence in his claim that Hisham conquered the valley."

"The Kashmir remained under a great threat of Arab invasion during the first half of eighth century is also substantiated by the annals of the Tang dynasty; from which we learn that the King of Kashmir, Chandrapida, sent an embassy to the Chinese court to invoke its aids against the Arabs, who were threatening his territories from the north".

The Muslim armies, as discussed earlier, conquered the neighboring countries, this resulted in most of the parts falling under the aegis of Muslims.

"By the territories situated close to the north and west of Kashmir, we mean Hindu S'ahi Kingdom and Dardistan. Hindu S'ahi Kingdom extended from the modern Afghanistan to Punjab. This is called Hindu Shahi empire by Al-Biruni. The small territories bordering the northern frontier of Kashmir namely, Swat, Hazara, Pakhli, Gilgit, Askardo, Chilas and Astor are collectively called Dardistan while the S'ahi Kingdom including Multan was conquered by Muhmid of Ghazni around A.D. 1000; the other small territories in question also seem to have been subsequently brought under Muslim sway by the Ghaznavids. We even find Dardistan which lies very close to the Kashmir Valley, having embraced Islam not later than the eleventh century, while invading Kashmir from the side of Loharkot (Modern Loharin in the Punch valley). Mahmud of Ghazni also converted the people of Tohi in Punch which falls near the western border of Kashmir valley. For the identification of the place where, according to Abu'l Fazal Baihaqi, Mahmud converted people to Islam."

It was Mohammad Alafi, a fugitive Arab commander, who is reported to have poured Islam in Kashmir, when they sought refuge in Kashmir in the eighth century after being failed by Arab chronicler. Since they were commanders of Raja Dahir and Kashmiri rulers shared healthy relation with the Sind and its rulers. So, they were greeted and handed over the territory of Shakalbar by the then ruler of Kashmiri Chandrapida.

"Alafi was a member of the tribe of Bani Asamah. He belonged to the army of Syria, He had killed Abdur-Rahman, son of Ash-as, for running away from the battle and out of fear (of Khalifa's punishment), had come and joined Dahir with 500 Arab warriors before the arrival of the Arab army in Sind."

Raja Chandrapida heartedly welcomed the Arabs commander so that they could be used to defend the Kashmir's borders against Arab's invasion.

The traders when came in contact with the Kashmiri Muslim, they highly influenced and embraced Islam and it is because of their efforts that the influx of Muslims largely contributed to the population of Kashmir. Though it was disrupted for a short span of time in the beginning of eleventh century yet in 1339, Islam was largely spread in the valley. The more interesting fact was that Muslims could be seen holding high positions in the sensitive wing of government, especially military.

"The fact that the Kashmiris were unaware of the Turkish war tactics, and, therefore, needed the service of Muslims to train them in this advanced military technology and tactics of warfare, is fairly attested by the following information recorded by Kalhana in the context of Tunga, the Prime Minister of Samgramaraja (1003-1028) who, at the request of Trilochanapala, the S'ahi prince, was sent by the King to help him against Mehmud of Ghazni.

In the month of Margasirsa the king despatched him (Tunga) to the country of the illustrious S'ahi Trilochanapala, who had asked for help. A large army attended by many Rajaputras, chief counselors, feudal chiefs and others (of rank), capable of making the earth shake followed him. When he, together with his son had been hospitably received by the S'ahi who had gone to meet him, and had been in that land for five or six days the S'ahi noticed that they gave no thought to night watches, the posting of scouts, to military exercises and other (preparations) proper for an attack and spoke thus to Tunga, who was intoxicated (with self-confidence). Until you have become acquainted with the Turuska warfare, you should post yourself on the scarp of this hill, (keeping) idle against your desire"

It is quite evident from history that there were members of Muslims captains in army of Ananta. Harsa, Biksacara and Jayasimha. Kalhana says, "Turuska Captains of hundred in the army of Harsa". The number rapidly increased with the passage of time when the valley became rampant to the civil wars and the rulers relied on Muslims. Thus, the Muslims became a significant part in the army of Kashmiri Rajas and Rajas regularly needed the support of neighboring Muslims rulers.

3. Mysticism in Kashmir:

Though, the teaching of Islam spread through different sources in the valley including tredsman, political and military expansion yet the contribution of Muslim preachers or Sufi scholars who were then called 'Rishis' had been quite remarkable and at large. And the evidence of these Muslim preachers has been supported by Muslim Chroniclers & hagiologists and contemporary Sanskrit Chroniclers. Sanskrit Chroniclers though largely accept the fact of conversion yet they have made some deliberate omissions.

"The Sanskrit chroniclers have totally omitted the mention of even such prominent Muslim preachers as Sayyid Sharaf Al-Din [Bulbul Shah]. Sayyid Hussain Simnani, Sayyid Ali Hamdani, Shaikh Nur al-Din and the like. In fact they have deliberately mentioned only two preachers' viz. Sayyid Mohammad Hamdani and Mir Shams al-Din 'Iraqi to make the posterity believe that conversion took place because of compulsion"

The idea that strongly supports the Muslim preachers spreading Islam is the presence of a missionary or a Rishi in the valley and the chain of conversion from any other religion to Islam. Sociologists have termed it as advocate assets which emphasized on how the Muslim preachers introduced innovation and led to a change. Such innovations have been made on grounds of the weaknesses in the then prevailing religion in the valley and the bigotry of the protagonists. The need of such innovation was felt by the preachers to meet the inadequacy and they accordingly worked out.¹⁴ Such activities of those saints or Rishis had been termed as proselytizing by the hagiological sources by which they count on the supernatural forces and to them mass conversion to Islam was the result of supernatural activities of the saints.

"A dispassionate study would reveal that the miracle ridden account of the life and activities of the saints is no doubt hyperbolic and exaggerated but it cannot be rejected out rightly. Doubts may be dispelled when instead of looking at the situation from the present perspectives, one places oneself in the thirteenth and fourteenth conditions of Kashmir when the divinity of a religion was weighed in terms of magnitude and quality of miracles its heroes would be able to demonstrate. Needless to say, the search of godliness of a given religion on the basis of supernatural powers of its propagators was a global phenomenon and Kashmir was only an integral part of this view about religious."

The mystic influence in the valley had been made quite descriptive and categorical History entails it as Rehsism, Reshism & Vedant, 'Savistie influences' & 'Tassawwuf'. How, a number of anthologies and historical analysis have created confusions by mistaking "Reosh" as "Reshi" and "Reshout" as "Re-shiyat"

The word "Reshi" had been used variably in Sanskrit and Persian. Sanskrit chronicler defines it as "a wise saint or sadhu who dedicated life to his search but is essentially a hermit." however Persian calls it as "a wounded lover imply "Resh" means warm (wool) therefore, Reshi for them is one who wear woolen dress and finally they concluded by saying that "Reshi is a Sufi but with strains of Heritage".

In the valley of Kashmir Reshi or saint was demonstrated in the following ways.

- That it was prevalent in Kashmir for a long time.
- That living in solitude amidst the natural environment was its policy.
- Untiring meditation is its declared manifesto.
- Simple vegetarian diet was the essence of Reshi practice.
- Self mortification is the main path through which the Reshi can reach his destination.
- Over powering of the evil self is the sin qua non of his order;
- Leaving behind the anger, jealousy, lust & greed and search for the absolute reality are his philosophy.
- To serve mankind and help the needy

4. SAYYID SHARAF AIDIN (BULBUL SHAH)

Islam is maintained to have completely spread in the valley of Kashmir in 1339, but basically it entered into the region in the eight century and was disrupted for a short span of time between 1320 to 1323 A.D. when a Buddhist ruler Richana came to rule. This ruler had converted to Islam after he was influenced by Sayyid Sharaf al Din who was commonly known as Bulbul shah. Bulbul shah came to Kashmir during the reign of Sahadeva.

"Sayyid sharaf al-Din was the disciple of Shah Niamat-ullah Farsi, who in turn was the disciple of Shaikh Shahab al-din Suhrawardi (1144-1234). Sayyid sharaf al-din was originally from Turkistan. And as directed by his preceptor; he arrived in Kashmir during the reign of Sahadeva. He passed away in 1326 and is buried in bulbul Langar in Srinagar."

Thus, according to the sources Suharwardi saints were actually the one to bring Islam in the valley and they worked with a huge group characterized by Pir-Murid. Bulbul Shah was one of those Suharwardi saints who came from Turkistan to enlighten the people of Kashmir. The conversion of the ruler Rinchana under the influence of Bulbul shah marked a large number of people getting converted to Islam, including Hindu Prime Minister Rawanchadra, who happened to be the predecessor of very influential noble family of Chandan.

"He is considered to be the first of his kind of missionaries. It was in order to pay him a tribute that Rinchana after getting converted to Islam and named as sultan Sadraddin endowed a rent free land grant and constructed a khwanquah and named after him" according to Mohammad Azam Dedamari, the 18th century chronicler of the khwanquah was functioning normally up to the end of the Sultans"

This was the first known khwanquah of Kashmir and it became so popular or that

the Mohalla in which it was built came to known as Bulbul Langar. (The mohalla is today called Bulbul langar). It was not only this that Sultan Sadruddin built a khwanquah on him name rather, he also built a jama Masjid in his newly constructed capital Rindranpur (Srinagar). Although the original mosque was burnt in a fire, mosques, however continued to be built on the original site and invariably carried the name of the original mosque i.e; Rinchoo Masjid. The present mosque, which too stands on the original site, is also famous by this name.

5. Mir Syed Ali Hamdani:

Mir Syed Ali Hamdani is marked among highly influential Sufis who worked hard for social and religious rejuvenation in Kashmir. His coming to Kashmir opened the doors of a new Kashmir during the reign of Qutabuddin 783/1384 with his followers religious scholars, mystics, and artisans. He was warmly welcomed by the ruler and got suffa to stay in Alauddin Pura. Vistas in the history of Kashmir, by his religious fervor energetic, and live cultural change, religious ethos, ethics, politico-economic system and Lingua Franca. He arrived during the time of Sayyid Ali according to sources. Muslims were not at large in number and it is also evident from the fact that a large number of non-Muslims formed the main prop of the government. And the Muslims who were small in numbers were engrossed in ancestral traditions and customs and even Sultan used to work every morning, and participate in the Yagna ceremony. Sayyid Ali was a kubrawi Sufi and he worked hard to bring the people out from the unnecessary disgusting customs, they were up and it was his efforts which made a number of people in the valley accept Islam.

The coinage of fraud and biased history is made clear by the stones which entail a number of controversial and stereotypical evidences regarding Sayyid in which it is mentioned that he did not share a healthy relation with Sultan and that he left Kashmir in disgust and many more. But there are no sources in support of the following evidence. However he instructed Muslim rulers to impose various kinds of taxes to non-Muslim subjects (Dhukhirat-ul-Muluk), but he never forced Sultan to enforce Islamic law in the empire or to make it a complete Islamic state. Many historians have created the impression that Syed's attitude and approach towards the Hindus of Kashmir was discriminatory. The views are based on Syeds theoretical formulations and rules and regulations for the dhimis and non muslims in his magnum opus Zakhizat ul Muluk. Without a deep understanding in the boarder perspective of the mentioned rules and their imposition in an Islamic State, they even forget the saints historical role in kashmirs cultural change which was guided both by expediency and wisdom.

Sayyad Ali's Attitude towards non-Muslims is greatly reflected in one of the letter he wrote to sultan from Pakhli.

"Pakhli is described as consisting of the whole of the territory between Kashmir in the east and the Indus in the west including the lower valley of the Kishanganga and the valley of streams which flow into the later."

At the time of this departure from the valley which included the following verses.

گر برین حال من بینو بر انداز و درم
زانکه چوں من به کنش را پیش بت بم بار نیست

If the Brahmin peeps into my (inner) condition, he will throw me out of his sight. If that he would not allow a wicked man like me to present myself before the idol. Thus, Sayyid Ali never had an unfriendly relation with non-Muslims and this is again supported from another letter he wrote to sultan in which he urged him to impose Shariah in the kingdom within the possible limits. Sayyad Ali did not stay for a long time in Kashmir. During his very short stay which does not extending more than one year, he propagated the teachings of Islam and his activities remained practically closer to the royal circles. He made the sultan learn God's command.

"The sultan considered Sayyid Ali his spiritual guide and gave him the little 'Shah-i-Hidayat' Qutabuddin grave to the sayyad".

Sayyad in his short span preached both the exoteric and esoteric aspects of Islam in the valley through his mystical thinking and work. He showed an accurate discernment and a keen practical sense in grasping the essential elements of popular Kashmiri religious culture and ethics. He commanded the disciples and followers to recite Aurad-i-Faltheiya in the mosque.

"The dhikr was the major activity of the Kubrawi order in Kashmir, So much so that regular attendance at the khanquah-i- Mualla seems to have become, for practical purposes, the best index of membership. the social aspect of dhikr was of fundamental significance"

Sayyid is popularly known in kashmir as Amir-i-kabir shah-i-Hamdan, Bani-e-Islam, Bani-e-Musalmani and Ali-e Thani.

6. Mir Syed Mohammad Hamdani :

Syed Ali grand mission was carried on with a great zeal, enthusiasm and clear understanding by his son, Mohammad Hamdani, who remained in Kashmir for long 20 years, and worked for islamisation of the state in letter and spirit and

advised and persuaded the great king of Kashmir, Sultan Sikander is reported to have constructed the state institutions on the lines established by Sharia and establish Islamic institutions like Madrasas, mosques and Khanqahs. Among the mosque and Khwanquah built during the period of Sikandar, Jamia Masjid and Khwanquah-e-Mualla at Srinagar are worth mentioning.

The role of Kubrawi Sufis especially Mir Syed Mohammad Hamdani is of great importance to mention because the transition of Islam in the valley of Kashmir had largely been a result of their efforts.

CONCLUSION:

The Sufis penetration into the Indian soil took place even before the Muslim conquests of India and the Muslim traders have already paved way for these saints.

These Sufis propagated the real picture of Islam individually, and through their well organized different Sufistic orders, and in this way the credit of conversion to a large number of Non-Muslims into Islam in India goes to these Sufi saints. As the spread of Islam in Kashmir is concerned, due to its peculiar geographical location, Islam as a dynamic political force made its appearance here somewhere in the 14th century A.D when Shamus-ud-Din Shah Mir took the reign of government in his own hands after Kota Rani killed herself at Anderkot the old Jajypidpore.

The credit of spreading of Islam in Kashmir goes to the Sufis. The earliest known Sufi in Kashmir was the Turkistani Suhrawardi Hazrath Sayyid Sharfuddin Abdur-Rahman, more commonly known as Bulbul Shah had travelled extensively in the west and Central Asia before finally arriving in Kashmir in 1295 C.E in the reign of the last Hindu king of Kashmir, Raja Suha Dev. It is called about Bulbul Shah that he was the murid of Shah Niamatullah FarsiRH. Being a descendant of Hazrat-Musa KazimRH, he is called as Moosvi. He belonged to the Suhrawardi silsila, that is why, he was also known as Suhrawardi. He made his mission according to this verse of the Holy Qur'an, "Seru fil-Arz" to visit on earth. He came via the north western boundaries of the Kashmir valley Bulbul Shah was the only noble man to whom Rinchana who till that time was the follower of Buddh Religion saw him in the Morning Prayer and through him (Bulbul Shah), he got converted to Islam. Hazrat Bulbul Shah made some 10,000 conversions to Islam. Hazrat Bulbul Shah lightened that lamp of light in Kashmir under whose light each and every individual of the society benefited irrespective of caste, colour, high and low, religion and communalism living apart the caste system for similarity and right of equality. Even one considers this new faith comfortable for him / herself. Rinchana Shah also known by the name of Sad-ur-ud-Din by the orders of his pir Bulbul Shah, he constructed a khanqah on the banks of river Jhelum which was the earliest Islamic khanqah of Kashmir. In one side of the khanqah there was a Jama Masjid and a langer khana. Bulbul Shah used to offer prayers in this mosque and there in the langer khana the necessary facilities of meals were provided to the students, Sufis, darwishes, fuqrah, travelers and the needy and poor people. For the expenses of the kitchen and the other other expenditure few villages were endowed.

REFERENCES:

1. Gauhar G. N. (2009). Kashmir Mystic Thought. Srinagar: Gulshan Books Kashmir, P. 27
2. Gauhar, G. N. (2001). Military operation in Kashmir. Delhi: Manas publications.
3. Giyasud din peer (1994). Kashmir Islam ideology and society. Jammu tawi: Jay Kay book house.
4. Ishaq, K. M. (2005). Kashmir's transition to Islam. Srinagar: Gulshan Books, p.65
5. Muqem, Badurudin. (2008). Kashmir Bliss. Residency Road Srinagar: Gulshan Books.
6. Qadri, S. A. (2002). Kashmiri Sufism. Srinagar: Gulshan publishers.
7. Rafiqi, A. Q. (2003). Sufism in Kashmir. Kashmir: India: Crown printing Press Srinagar, pp. 35-36
8. Santideva Sadu. (2000). Development of mysticism in Kashmir. New Delhi: Cosmo publication.
9. Sharma Suresh.k ,Bakhsi.R.S, (1996). Encyclopedia of Kashmir. Delhi: Anmol publication pvt.ltd
10. Sufi, G. M. D. (1996). Islamic culture in Kashmir. New Delhi: Capital publishing house.
11. Wani, M. A. (2004). Islam in Kashmir 14th- 16th century. Srinagar: oriental publishing house, p. 47